



**File Code:** 1950; 2810  
**Date:** July 8, 2019

Dear Interested Parties:

The Madison Ranger District of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest is initiating scoping and welcomes comments on two proposed Plans of Operations for placer exploration and evaluation work on National Forest System lands in the Tobacco Root Mountains. The **California Creek Placer Evaluation Project**, proposed by Coles Marketing Systems, Inc., involves 22 placer test pits in the California Creek Area near Laurin, Montana. The **Saw Log Placer Exploration Project**, proposed by Mr. Rob Opie, involves 3 placer test pits in the Saw Log Creek area near McCallister, Montana. Additional project details and maps are provided on the following pages.

The District has tentatively determined the proposed projects may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) [36 CFR 220]. A proposed action may be categorically excluded only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and the proposed action is within a category listed in section 31.12 or 32.2 of FSH 1909.15. This proposed activity falls within section 32.2(8):

*(8) Short-term ( 1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads (36 CFR 220.6(e)(8)).*

## How to Comment

Please share your comments, concerns, or ideas with Dale Olson, District Ranger, at the Madison Ranger District, at 5 Forest Service Rd., Ennis, MT 59729. He can also be reached by phone at 406-682-4253, or by fax at 406-682-4233. If you prefer, send your comments electronically to [comments-northern-beaverhead-deerlodge@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-beaverhead-deerlodge@fs.fed.us) and type the **California Creek Placer Evaluation** or **Saw Log Placer Exploration** in the subject line.

Your comments are welcome anytime, but will be most helpful if they are submitted by **August 15, 2019**. Comments in response to this solicitation, including names, postal and email addresses and phone numbers, will be considered part of the public record, and available for public review. If you do not respond to this letter you will receive no further information. However, you may always find information about this and other Forest projects on the web at [www.fs.usda.gov/goto/bdnf/projects](http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/bdnf/projects) under the "Forest Projects" heading.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dale Olson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

DALE OLSON  
District Ranger

Enclosures (2)

California Creek Placer Evaluation Project Description and Maps (3 pages)

Saw Log Placer Exploration Project Description and Map (2 pages)

## **California Creek Placer Evaluation Project**

### **Purpose and Need for Action**

The Madison Ranger District has received a Plan of Operations (P/O) from Coles Marketing Systems, Inc. proposing to evaluate a placer gold deposit on unpatented mining claims located in Section 8 of Township 5 South, Range 3 West (Montana Principal Meridian). The project site is located approximately 8 miles northeast of Laurin, MT in the California Creek and King's Gulch area, which is part of the Ramshorn Management Area and the Tobacco Root Landscape.

The Forest Service's need for action is to respond to the proponent's submittal of a Plan of Operations, and to ensure that operations will be conducted so as to minimize adverse environmental impacts on surface resources (36 CFR 228, Subpart A, 228.8). The purpose of the proposed action is to authorize mineral exploration activities consistent with the statutory right of the proponent under the General Mining Law of 1872 and other laws and regulations. The decision for the Forest Service to make is whether to approve the P/O as submitted, or to approve it with additional measures to protect surface resources. The proponent's need for the project is to determine if economically viable minerals deposits exist within the proposed project area, and to define the nature, extent, shape, and economic value of such deposits.

### **Proposed Action Summary**

The proposed action is for the Forest Service to approve Coles Marketing Systems, Inc.'s proposed Plan of Operations for placer evaluation activities in the California Creek area of the Madison Ranger District. Coles' evaluation work involves sampling cross-sections at regular intervals across the mineral deposit. The operator proposes to dig 22 test pits, each measuring 5' wide, 10' long, and 3' – 5' deep. Two of the centrally located test pits would be used for processing the samples through a portable wash plant. One test pit would be allowed to collect groundwater that would be pumped to the portable wash plant. Effluent from the wash plant would be directed to the second processing hole to settle out any silt. The processing holes would remain open for the duration of the project, and be backfilled once the evaluation work is complete. Individual test pits would be reclaimed at the end of the day, or first thing the following morning. Reclamation would involve backfilling washed gravels in each pit, then placing stockpiled topsoil on the washed gravels. Many of the test pit locations are already disturbed from previous mining activity.

Other project design criteria or Forest Service required mitigations identified to date include:

- All processes will incorporate the techniques outlined in the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology SP-106 publication (Montana Placer Mining Best Management Practices).
- No use of chemicals for mineral processing.
- Access points will be chosen to disturb the least amount of shrubs and trees.
- Small trees may need to be cut, but no merchantable timber is expected to be disturbed.
- Slopes and rock piles that may be disturbed for egress of equipment will be contoured to the surrounding landscape and roughened to facilitate plant growth.
- Construction activities would occur when soils are dry to avoid compaction and rutting due to heavy equipment.
- No temporary or new roads are required, all access is on existing open routes (other than the proposed overland travel).

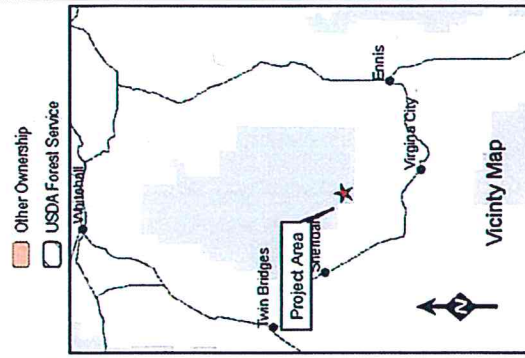
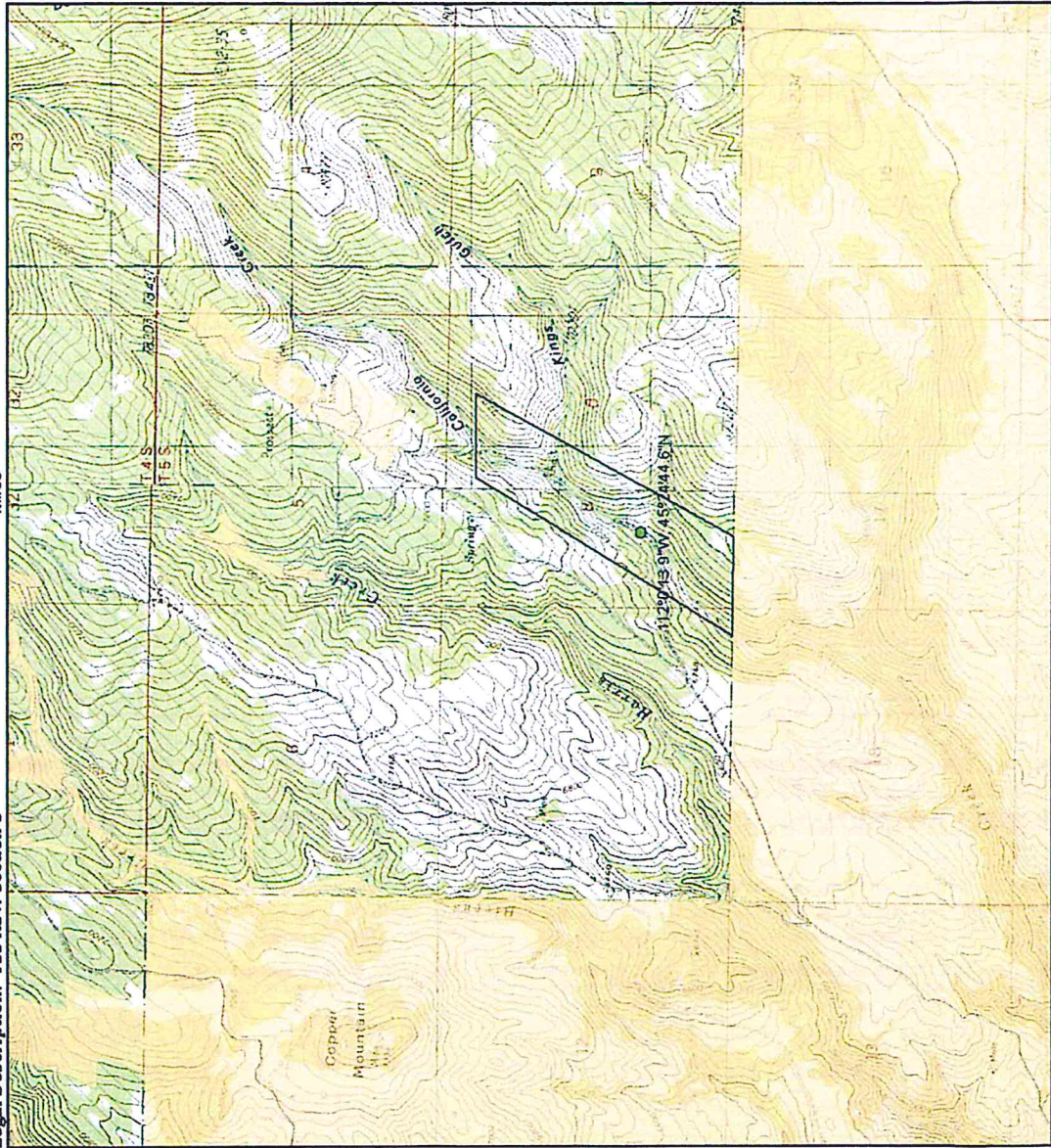
### **Maps**

Please see attachments (2)



A vertical scale bar labeled "Miles" with tick marks at 0, 0.325, 0.65, and 1.3.

**Legal Description: T5S R3W Section 8**

[illegible]

Created By: Erik Torgerson    Printed: 20111113  
This map replaces all versions of same title printed with prior dates

TFSNFSEwertheadDevelo...ProjectENFASISN5\_madison's,altomiasCrocketPOC,altomias\_Crook\_May.pdf



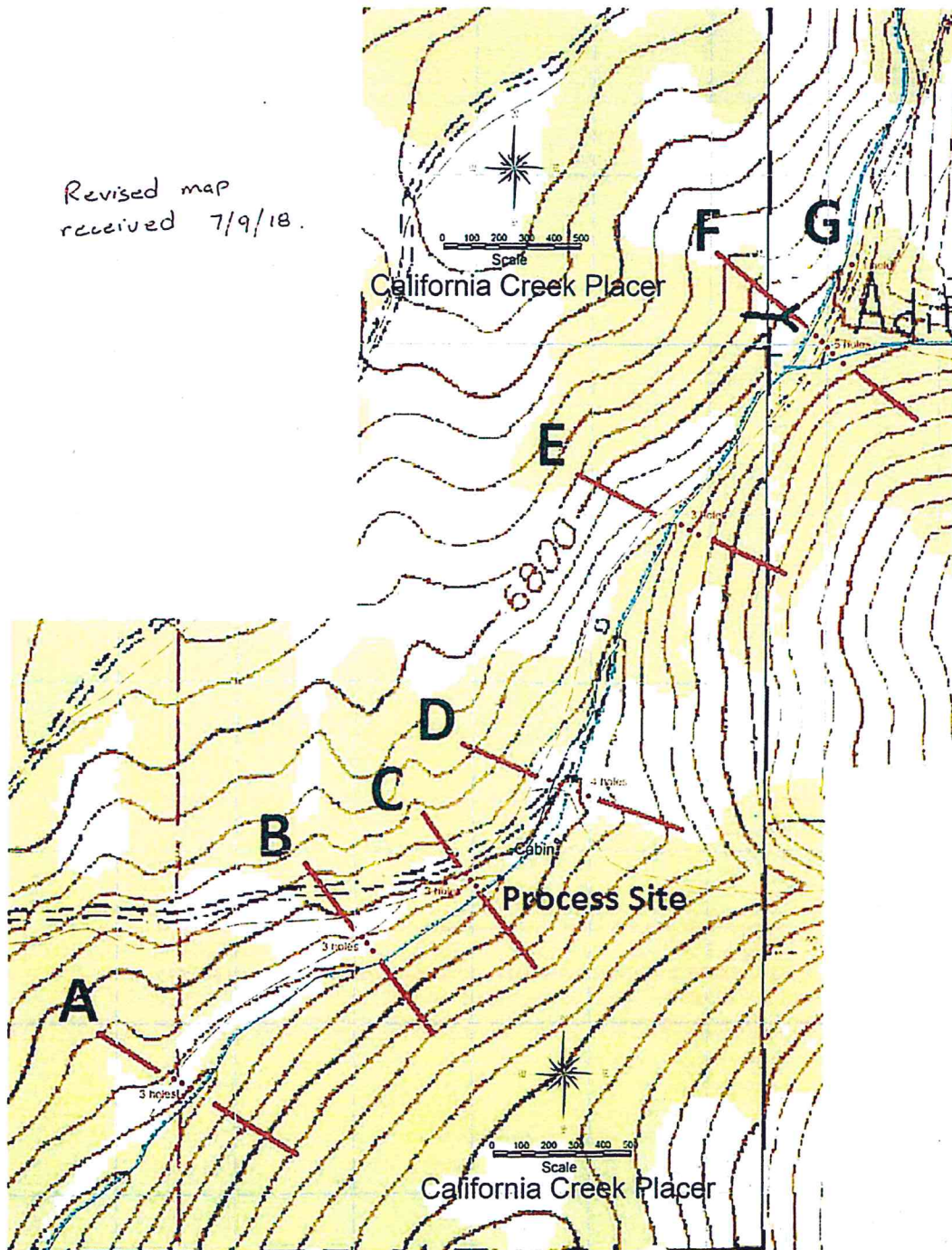
## Caring for the Land and Serving People



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Revised map  
received 7/9/18.



## **Saw Log Placer Placer Exploration Project**

### **Purpose and Need for Action**

The Madison Ranger District has received a Plan of Operations (P/O) from Mr. Rob Opie proposing to explore for placer gold on unpatented mining claims located in Section 16 of Township 4 South, Range 2 West (Montana Principle Meridian). The project site is located approximately 10 miles northwest of McCallister, MT in the Saw Log Creek area, which is part of the Meadow Creek Management Area and the Tobacco Root Landscape.

The Forest Service's need for action is to respond to the proponent's submittal of a Plan of Operations, and to ensure that operations will be conducted so as to minimize adverse environmental impacts on surface resources (36 CFR 228.8, Subpart A). The purpose of the proposed action is to authorize mineral exploration activities consistent with the statutory right of the proponent under the General Mining Law of 1872 and other laws and regulations. The decision for the Forest Service to make is whether to approve the P/O as submitted, or to approve it with additional measures to protect surface resources. The proponent's need for the project is to determine if economically viable minerals deposits exist within the proposed project area, and to define the nature, extent, shape, and economic value of such deposits.

### **Proposed Action Summary**

The proposed action is for the Forest Service to approve Mr. Rob Opie's proposed Plan of Operations for placer exploration activities in the Saw Log Creek area of the Madison Ranger District. Exploration would include digging a total of three (3) test pits. Each test pit would be 6' wide, 10' long, and 5' – 10' deep. The pits would be a minimum of 100 feet from Saw Log Creek. One additional hole, 10' long, 10' wide, and 3' deep, will be excavated near test pit #2 and used as a recirculation pond when the samples are processed with a small trommel. This pond will remain open for the duration of the project. Reclamation involves backfilling each test pit after processing, and backfilling the recirculation hole once all samples are processed. Top soil will be salvaged from each hole and stockpiled on the uphill sides of the holes for placement after backfilling. Access points will be selected to disturb the least amount of shrubs and trees. Banks that may be disturbed for egress of equipment will be contoured to surrounding landscape and any compacted areas will be prepared to facilitate plant growth.

Other project design criteria or Forest Service required mitigations identified to date include:

- All processes will incorporate the techniques outlined in the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology SP-106 publication (Montana Placer Mining Best Management Practices).
- No use of chemicals for mineral processing.
- Refueling will take place at the trammel site, without crossing of the creek with fuel cans.
- Equipment will need to travel cross-country for approximately 200 yards. Saw Log Creek will be crossed via wooden planks laid across in the narrowest and driest locations to avoid compaction and degradation of stream banks.
- Construction activities would occur when soils are dry to avoid compaction and rutting due to heavy equipment.
- No temporary roads are required, all access is on existing open routes (other than the proposed overland travel).

### **Maps**

Please see attachments (1)



